THE EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL NEEDS
OF THE BLIND.

by
Rev. Thomas J. Carroll

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ONE WHO SURVEYS the whole field of blindness in this country seldom thinks of "blind persons" or of "the blind" without thinking of older persons, since relatively very few of the total blind group are under age twenty-one. The immediate inclination of the worker for the blind assigned the topic "The Educational and Social Needs of Blind Persons" would be to discuss the situation of adult blind persons in this country. This might, in fact, be helpful to you in reminding you again of the type of world into which the blind child in your classrooms will be going.

Yet, it seems likely that it would be of greater assistance to you, and of more immediate interest, if we restrict the title somewhat to read "The Educational and Social Needs of Young Blind Persons," understanding that our group of young blind persons includes all of those in the school years from kindergarten to the university.

What are these needs? It would be tempting to answer this in terms of means rather than end, and speak technically about the special tools which may be used in an educational structure for the education of blind children. It would be easy to be glib and, considering the ends of education, to say that the blind young person's needs are the same as those of any other young person, depending then on your expertise to apply this to the problem at hand. It would be simple (all too simple) to summarize the needs in a sanctified phrase, such as that the needs of the blind child are *"Ut cognoscant Te*—that they may know Thee, the one True God, and Him Whom Thou has sent, Jesus Christ Thy Son"; or again in the canonized phrase, "to know, love, and serve God in this world and to be happy with Him in the next."

But the phrases have too often the unfortunate connotation that the knowledge, the love, and the service of God are in a vacuum. Now, clearly, most religious teachers, or at least most religious leaders, have come to recognize in fact, and are beginning to recognize in the planning of their educational courses, that our contact of knowledge, love, and service of God is seldom in a vacuum; rather, it is in a specific environment which we carry with us and in which we move. Above all, it is in a social environment peopled first by ourselves and then by all the others influencing our lives even in the remotest way.

But there is a specific problem for blind persons. Many teachers who have come to the point of seeing the social environment as supremely important in the lives of other young people have somehow overlooked this when it comes to blind persons. In their actions, it is made to appear that blind persons meet God in some sort of vacuum. There is little or no recognition of the total person who functions in the environment; and there appears to be some expectation that blind persons will reach God in a special way. I refer to teachers who think that the blind student, *because of his blindness*, has a special vo-

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cation to holiness, to teachers who train others for life but train the blind student only for some intellectual or perhaps spiritual existence, to teachers who neglect the physical or social training of blind students.

These statements may seem overdrawn or exaggerated to some. Look, then, at some of the needs of the blind young person: clearly, it will only be "some" since this is not a treatise on education or on the needs of young people. And, admittedly, my incomplete list will contain headings which overlap one another. It may, nevertheless, be of some assistance in reviewing the problem.

Clearly, our effort must be to help the blind young person to find some formation in his youth which will allow him religious fulfillment in his life—spiritual fulfillment and moral fulfillment. We are on the threshold of being able to offer him something here which he could not have received in the years we have known or in some centuries before. Depending on the action of our bishops meeting in Washington this week, we will be able to give him an opportunity of participating intelligently in the liturgy of the Church. As the Vatican Council's Constitution on the Liturgy is implemented in the years ahead, we can hope increasingly for the opportunity to give him a scriptural-based spirituality such as we could not have given him in the past.

As Mrs. Ryan pointed out in her excellent book [1] which I suspect most of its critics have not read, the opportunity is ahead for a truly kerygmatic approach to the teaching of religion. We will not find it all next week, or next year—but it is ahead; and it has particular value for the blind student in this age of the vernacular. With missals a thing of the past, he need not worry about the lack of a Braille missal. If his formation is spiritually based, he will have less worry that his books of spiritual pabulum are limited. With the new insistence on the preaching of the Word of God, and the importance of the word of God, we can at least hope that his lot will be better.

Yet, he has and will have rights which must be satisfied to have available to him some of the works of Catholic authors which meet his mature development at the level his other reading meets that development. This may still be difficult, but it is something which the good teacher must make possible in one or another way.

The blind student needs intellectual fulfillment. Few will deny this, but too many will limit it to academic terms. He needs exploration, an inquisitive mind, an interest in learning, a desire for knowledge. He needs to be encouraged in every way to latch on to all that is new, to all that is unknown, in order that he may find knowledge and ultimate truth.

Sensory fulfillment is necessary to any child—but it is training a thousand times more necessary for the young person who is blind. Without the use of sight through which new knowledge comes, he must be aided to develop every remaining sense and to use it to the fullest. *Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit aliquomodo in sensu*—and unless we enlarge the scope of the remaining senses, the intellect will be stunted for want of information.

I, of course, believe that the one best qualified to develop the senses, to give sensory training, is the "peripatologist." But every good teacher, every imaginative person should be working with the blind young person to assist in the development—to interest him in it and to give him the necessary feed-back, the information which he can not test. All this, in order that he may have sensory fulfillment.

He needs physical fulfillment in many ways—the development of the body,

[1] Mary Perkins Ryan, *Are Parochial Schools the Answer?*

the healthy body for the sound mind. This can not be something left to a course in calisthenics. And the blind young man or the blind young woman must have an opportunity for running and jumping and taking part in competitive activities. There must be a chance for ease and grace in movement. There must be a chance for the status in physical competitive activities which is so important to so many of the young. Physical fulfillment must again involve the inquisitiveness that we spoke of in talking of intellectual fulfillment. There must be the seeking and finding in physical environments, the suiting and fitting of his own physical environment, his own body, to the physical environment of the world in which he lives and moves and breathes. With this must be the development of daring and the opportunity to explore. Inhibition of this through the fear or rigorous mentality of the teacher can be stifling to the body, to the mind, and to the soul.

Vocational fulfillment is a wide term covering many difficult things. There is the vocation during the school life and the mature life. As to the former, there must be an opportunity for the exercise of talents, for the harsh, rough rubbing of personality on personality, for the ups and downs that are part of every growing life. Where there can be no pushing by the teacher, but only a leading, a bringing out of the personality which is within. What I fear most is summarized in one phrase—freshman president and senior class member—the situation where many a student wins on the basis of his blindness, then loses on the basis of his personality.

But vocation as we normally think of it concerns life—the life after school. If we take it in terms of the economic working activity, it is necessary now to face the fact that we are up against an untangible and unknowable.

There is hardly a meeting or convention nowadays without somebody mentioning the magic word "automation," or perhaps "cybernetics." Unfortunately, although we know the meaning of the words, we have only the vaguest and most contradictory ideas as to what the fact of the cybernetic revolution will bring in its course. Most people appear to believe that there will be fewer and fewer unskilled jobs, and an increasing demand for education suited to controlling the machines which control the machines. But there is also reason to believe that entirely new opportunities may be found in new service fields. There is nothing that I can say to help prepare you except to say that all of us have an obligation to keep abreast of the latest findings and to see wherein the future lies. Then we must be looking for the non-stereotyped, non-stultifying occupation for the person who is blind.

At the same time we must keep in mind that perhaps the future will not be at all like the past, and in the new leisure it may well be that job or position status will no longer hold first place. It may be, instead, that leadership and leisure may be the future status vocation. Here again, if this is true, the blind person must find fulfillment.

But vocational fulfillment to many of us has a somewhat more restricted meaning. We still think of vocational with a capital "V" and think of the religious vocation. Here I can only say that somehow the future must find an end to prejudice against blind persons in religious orders and communities. I do not believe for a moment that every blind person has a religious vocation or that most do. But certainly some have this vocation and many have met the rebuffs of prejudice in trying to carry it out. Perhaps as far as the priesthood is concerned there will be no opportunities—at least for testing the degree of prejudice—because after the Council the blind person might well have a greater possibility of carrying out the life of the special priesthood. The greatly in-

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creased use of the vernacular, the distribution of roles in the liturgy, with deacons and subdeacons announcing the Word of God, and especially the increased use of concelebration in the Western Church, may well open up opportunities in the priesthood which had been closed many years except to the exceptional few.

Sexual fulfillment is a right of the blind person. And we must keep this in mind at all times in dealing with young persons who are blind. It may be that the sexual fulfillment is that which is found in the giving of one's self to God in a life of celibacy when one is called in this direction—or it may be sexual fulfillment in the life of marriage. But, whatever the road to be taken, the blind young man must be given the opportunity for developing his manhood and the blind young woman her womanhood. With this is a social fulfillment where the complementary natures of the sexes are recognized and given an opportunity for growth. All too often in the past there has been a senseless segregation of the sexes in the education of blind children or a failure to allow for developmental needs. If our own attitude and outlook are balanced and mature with regard to blindness and with regard to sex, then these are problems which we will help to solve rather than to exaggerate by avoidance.

Social fulfillment is a broad term that has to do with all that we have talked about and more. It has to do once again with the give and take. It has to do with independence. It has to do with equality in the widest sense of that word—in the sense which the Supreme Court has helped to teach us. This minority group must, like all minority groups, be given an opportunity for full functioning.

I said that I would give a partial list, and the partial list has grown long. Perhaps it is enough to stimulate and to even cause concern. Perhaps it is enough so that in a period of discussion you may enrich the list and bring out the totality of its meaning.

What are the educational and social needs of young blind persons? They are for a training and an opportunity that they may find life in its fullest here and hereafter—the liberty of the sons of God—and the pursuit of that happiness which can be found in reflection here and in totality in the life to come.

Educational and Social Needs of the Deaf

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MUCH OF THE PUBLIC DEBATE for a decade or more about the need for improved curriculum content in general education has been over the progressive education controversy. The advocates of improvements have often suggested a return to solid subject matter and intellectual discipline through a revival of the basic subjects taught in the late nineteenth century. The problem is not that simple, either in general education or in education of the deaf. The

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